Repainting of 1891 Swing & Steidinger Building Advertising Sign

I lead a group of citizens and a couple Alderman on projects to improve our small town. Someone had the idea of repainting our old building advertising signs. I repainted the 1st sign, the Occident Flour sign, in August of 2016.

For 2017, we decided to repaint the 2nd sign, the Swing & Steidinger sign.

My historical research shows these 2 men were only in business together for about 24 months. They formed the business in 1891, and it is very likely this sign was painted then.

The biggest challenge on this project was the missing letters between the 3rd and 4th windows. The current owner of the building bought it in 1982. He ran a story in the local

newspaper asking if anyone knew what the missing letters were. The ex-mayor saw the story, and reported the missing letters were only visible if we had a rain from the North (which is unusual for us). Within a couple of weeks of running the newspaper story, we got a rain from the North. The building owner went across the street to the second story of the building opposite of his, and wrote down the missing letters. He kept this information in his building folder, which he loaned to me.

I took a photo of the building and imported it into Google Sketchup. I drew each letter, one by one, in Sketchup. For the missing letters, I first copied a letter from another word if possible. If the letter was not previously used, I made a new letter as close to the old 1891 font style as I could.

For missing letters or words, I made a wood pattern letter using 3/16" thick Luan plywood. I needed a way to scale my photo in Sketchup. I went back to the sight, and measured the horizontal distance between 4 of the posts that hold up the awning. I then made my wood letters.

Unfortunately, this scaling method did not work. The first wood pattern wood I needed to use was "Tanks". When I took the wood pattern to the wall, I noticed it was visibly too small, compared to the wording above. Using a man-lift, I measured the height and width of the first U in Agricultural at the top. When I got home, I compared the actual dimensions to the Sketchup dimensions.....and entered them into an Excel file.

first U in agricultural					
Using horizontal distance from ground level posts					
width	16.5625				
height	13.78125				
actual measured size on May 7, 2017					
width	19.125				
height	17				
ratio of actual to post method					
				avg	
width	1.154717			1.194139	
height	1.23356				
ratio of post method to actual					
width	0.866013				
height	0.810662				
So, I scaled the photo and letters in Sketchup by a 1.19 factor.					

Per the spreadsheet above, the average scaling error resulted in a need to scale the Sketchup photo up by a factor of 1.19. I did this on the Tanks word, and it worked fine. I then made the 3 missing lines of text, roofing, grouting, and repair.....and the wood patterns worked fine as well.
I prepared some notes to use for a local Pontiac radio station interview on the project. These notes summarize the project.....

Swing & Steidinger sign project
-Fairbury Improvement Group
-Goals are to improve quality of life for current citizens and make Fairbury an attractive place for visitors
-We use a list of changes and improvements to manage our projects
-Re-painting the old advertising signs on the sides of buildings was one of the suggestions
-The largest building sign in Fairbury is for advertising Occident Flour
-sign is approximately 68 feet wide and 18 feet high
-repainted it in August of 2016
-The 2nd largest sign in Fairbury is for Swing & Steidinger Agricultural Rooms
-34 feet wide and 11 feet high
-starts at 18 feet above Main Street, top at 29 feet
-Sign originally was painted in 1891 .....126 years ago
- Searching the online digitized Blade, there is no article saying when Swing & Steidinger started their business.
-Their first ad in the Blade is March 14, 1891.
-They advertised periodically in the Blade until November 5, 1892, when the Blade ran an article saying the hardware business was sold to John A. and Gottlieb Stoller.
-The two Stollers then ran an ad saying their business was called Stoller & Stoller.
-This indicates the original Swing & Steidinger sign was probably painted in 1891.
-They were only in business about 21 months before selling it to Stoller & Stoller.
-We have a 1913 picture of the building which shows the Swing & Steidinger sign was gone by then, which makes sense since they sold it in 1892.
-Either the sign was brushed off the bricks, or painted over.
- Over the years, the sign letters have been working their way out to become visible again.
-Swing was Joseph Gilbert Swing 1861-1948
-Opened his own hardware store a couple blocks east
-He and family moved to Indiana in 1914
-We think Steidinger was Alexander Steidinger 1865-1950
-We think he returned to farming after the store closed

-Some of the challenges in this project were:
-Getting access to repaint the sign with the lettering being 18 feet to 40 feet in the air
-is a substantial wood awning below the lettering
-awning roof angle is 27 degrees
-this is rated easy to walk on, 29 is difficult, and over 33 not recommended

-very hard on your ankles at 29 degrees
-could only reach a couple rows of lettering
-an electrical power line and speaker wire were in the way of using a man-lift
-fortunately, they belong to the City for Christmas lighting and speakers
-City of Fairbury crew temporarily moved them for me....THANKS!
-Sign was completely missing 3 key words
-when building was bought by Gordon Kinate in 1982, he put plea in the Blade if anyone knew what missing letters were
-ex Mayor Roy Taylor said they became visible if a rain from the North
-within a couple of weeks of plea article, it rained from the North
-Gordon wrote down the missing letters and put the info in his folder
-roofing, grouting, and repairing were the missing words
-How to create the missing words??
-took photograph of all lettering
-inputted the photograph into my computer, and scaled to full-scale size
-to build the missing words.....
-used letters from other words in the sign and scaled them
-or if letter not used elsewhere, modified an Aerial Bold font letter
-printed the missing word on paper
-glued paper onto thin plywood and cut out wood patterns
-held wood patterns against brick wall and pencil traced
-taped around pencil tracing with blue masking tape
-painted each letter with 3 coats of paint

-Some stats on this project

-sign was 38 feet wide and 13 feet high
-33 larger letters at 16 inches high
-92 smaller letters at 8 inches high
-total of 125 letters
-took 5 calendar days to paint
-approximately 5x8 = 40 man hours
-access device was 34 foot man lift
-about (6) 1" chip brushes
-about 2 gallons of white paint
-about 6 rolls of 3/4" blue masking tape (1,080 feet of masking tape)
-most "sidewalk supervisors" at one point in time = 2
-labor donated by me
-material expense covered by Building owner Gordon Kinate

Results:

-had many people every day walk or drive by and say thanks
-sign is right on Main Street just west of Old City Hall

Visit Fairbury

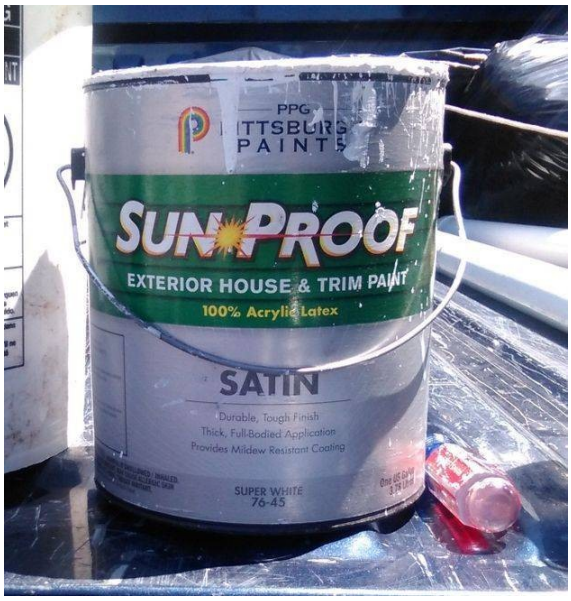
-check out the Historic Murals in Central Park on Main street
-check out the Occident Flour sign at 2nd and Main
-check out 5 historical murals across from New City Hall
-there are 5 restaurants all within walking distance (Lost in Time, Benchwarmers, Gigs, Chinese, or Dave's Deli) and lots of shopping as well

Stat Comparison of Occident Flour versus Swing & Steidinger

	Occident Flour	Swing & Steidinger
Over-All Sign Dimensions	68x18 ft.	38x13 ft
60" Large Letters	13	0
30" Medium Letters	16	0
15" Small Letters	26	0
14" Letters	0	33
8" Letters	0	92
Total No. of Letters	55	125
Border line	156 ft.	None
Calendar weeks to paint	2	1
Man-Hours	100	35
Access Methods	6 foot step ladder, 24 ft extension ladder, scaffolding, man-lift	34 ft. Man-lift
# of 1" chip brushes	12	6
# of 2" chip brushes	12	0
Gallons of Paint	8	2
# Rolls of 3/4" blue masking tape	12	6
Feet of masking tape	2,160	1080
Most "Sidewalk Supervisors" at same time	10	2

Paint

I researched the Internet to see if there were any recommendations for what type of paint to use.....to repaint a ghost sign on brick. I really did not find anything. I consulted with my local Ace hardware paint expert (he is a 3rd generation paint guy). We concluded a good grade of latex house paint was probably the best way to go.



Luan wood pattern letters

I made the patterns letters, or in some cases whole words, using 3/16" thick Luan plywood. It is sturdy enough, and it light weight also.

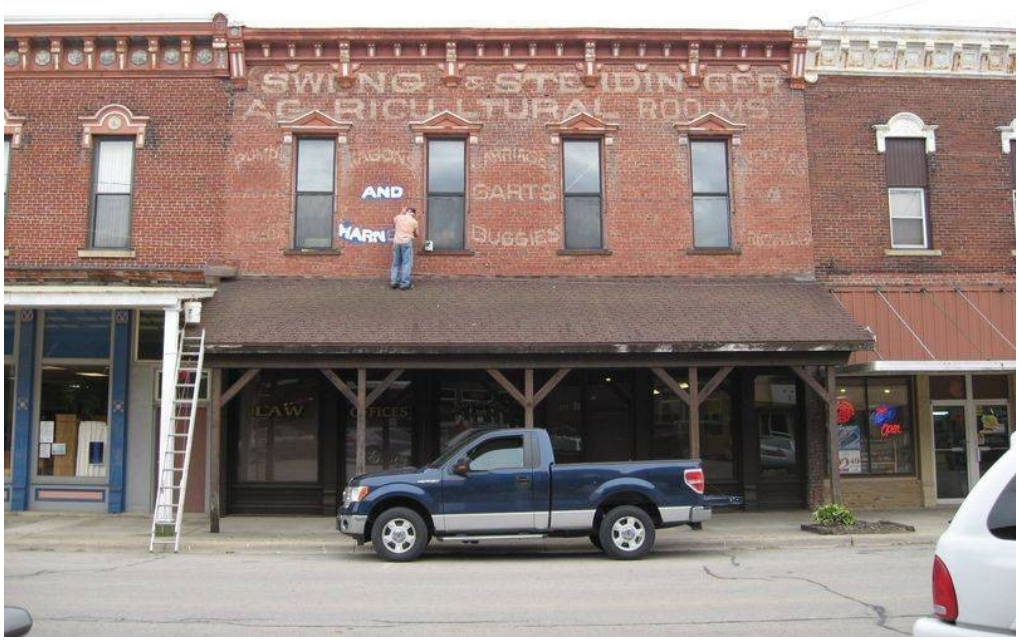
Standing on the Awning

I had to wait until the electrical wires got out of the way.....before I could use the man lift. I decided to try standing on the wood awning, to paint the lower letters.

On my house, one spot is too steep for me to stand on. I measured it using an electronic angle finder and it was 29 degrees. I then went on the Internet, to see what degree is too steep to walk on.

Item	Pitch - rise	Pitch - run	Degrees	ability to walk on
Example	1	12	4.8	easy to walk on
Example	2	12	9.5	easy to walk on
Example	3	12	14.0	easy to walk on
Example	4	12	18.4	easy to walk on
Example	5	12	22.6	easy to walk on
Example	6	12	26.6	easy to walk on
Example	7	12	30.3	easily with caution
Example	8	12	33.7	Can be walked with extreme caution, not advisable
Example	9	12	36.9	Can be walked with extreme caution, not advisable
Example	10	12	39.8	Can be walked with extreme caution, not advisable
Example	11	12	42.5	Can not be walked on
Example	12	12	45.0	Can not be walked on
Example				
Cental Park Gazebo			20	
17 Brookwood e. side			29	easily with caution
Swing & Steidinger			27	easy to walk on

The Internet table matched my experience, that 29 degrees was too steep. I then measured swing & Steidinger sign awning, and it was 27 degrees. I used my 24 foot extension ladder to get up onto the awning, and I could walk on it ok. I taped and painted about 1.5 hours. I noticed the 27 degrees puts a lot of stress on your ankles and lower legs. I could feel some slight pain in my lower legs the next couple of days after doing the 1.5 hours of work. I decided to use the man lift to repaint all of the letters.

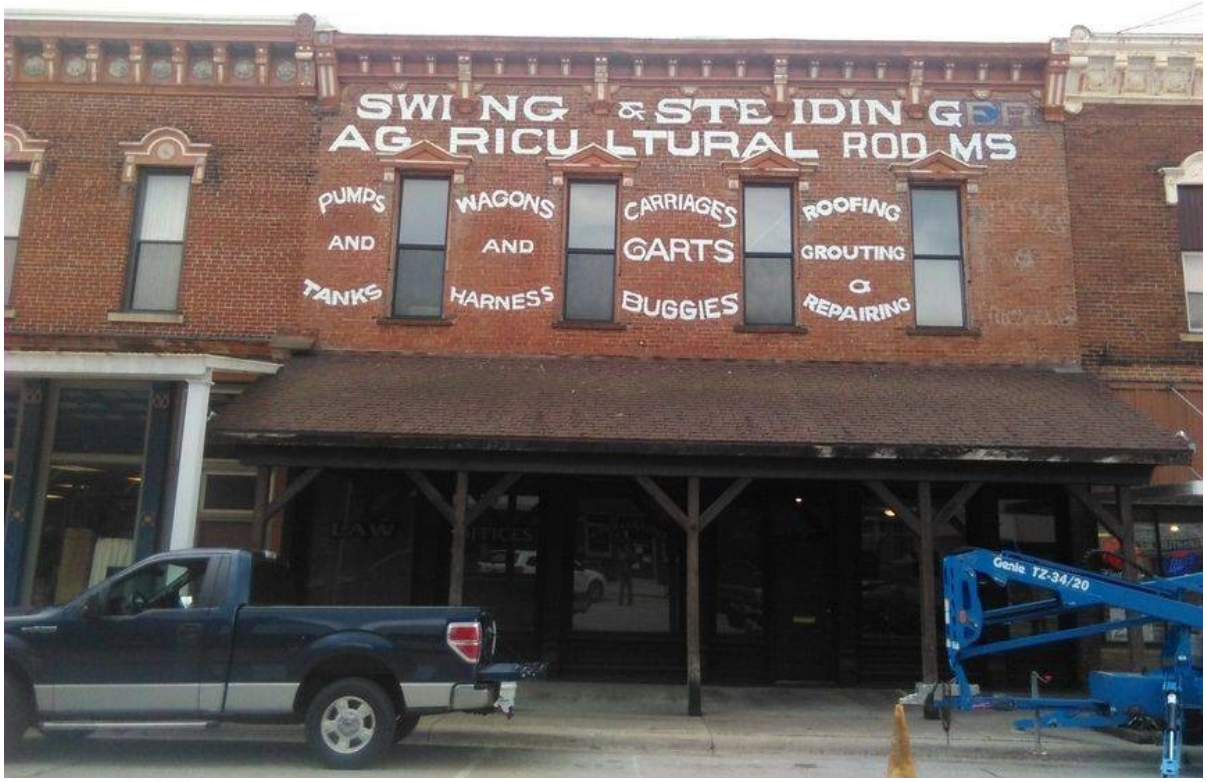


Progress Photographs

WAGONS
AND
HARNESS
PUMPS
AND

SWI NG
AG RICU L
PUMPS
AND
WAGONS
AND
HARNESS

SWING & STEIDIN
AGRICULTURAL ROD
PUMPS AND TANKS
WAGONS AND HARNESS
CARRIAGES GARTS BUGGIES
Genie TZ-34/20


SWI NG & STE IDIN GER
AG RICU LTURAL ROD MS
PUMPS AND TANKS
WAGONS AND HARNESS
CARRIAGES CARTS BUGGIES
ROOFING GROUTING & REPAIRING
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AG RICU LTURAL ROD MS
PUMPS AND TANKS
WAGONS AND HARNESS
CARRIAGES CARTS BUGGIES
ROOFING GROUTING & REPAIRING
BICYCLES & TRICYCLES
LAW OFFICES
Genie TZ-34/20

SWI NG & STE IDIN GER
AG RICU LTURAL ROD MS
PUMPS AND TANKS
WAGONS AND HARNESS
CARRIAGES CARTS BUGGIES
ROOFING GROUTING & REPAIRING
BICYCLES & TRICYCLES
LAW

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Closing Thoughts on this Project

This was a fun project. The man-lift made it easy, and I completed the project much faster than I thought. I also learned it is really hard on the legs to work from a 27 degree roof awning.

Dale C. Maley
May 13, 2017